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ABSTRACT

Teacher mentoring programs are perceived as an effective staff development approach for beginning teachers. By establishing mentoring programs, districts serve two purposes: novice teachers get a strong start in their careers, and experienced classroom teachers serving as mentors receive recognition and incentives. Supporting beginning teachers at the outset contributes to retention in the school system. The significance of mentoring for beginning teachers is gaining wider recognition throughout the Pacific region. The mentoring process extends far beyond supporting new teachers, and it is more demanding then classroom teaching. Even experienced teachers cannot always objectively assess the quality of new teachers' teaching performance. In education, mentoring is a complex, multidimensional process of guiding, teaching, influencing, and supporting new teachers. The terms mentoring, modeling, and coaching are often used interchangeably by educators, though there are actually significant differences in concept. Functions of the mentor teacher vary according to the needs of the new employee, the goals of the mentoring program, and the local educational context or situation. Staff development is crucial in creating successful mentoring relationships. As many teachers are leaving the profession, it is important to devise new support structures to induct and retain new teachers. Four tasks that schools and districts must undertake in starting mentoring programs include selecting and training mentors, matching mentors and proteges, setting goals and expectations, and establishing mentoring programs. (SM)

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The Role of Teacher Mentoring in Educational Reform

by Stan Koki*

The addition in 1994 of professional development of teachers to the original six National Education Goals underscored the importance of involving competent teachers in education reform efforts. The goal implies that "practicing teachers are key to the transformation of schools and that in order for teachers to lead the reform efforts, they need to be offered expanded and enriched professional development experiences" (Dilworth and Imig, 1995). Specifically, the goal states:

> "By the year 2000, the nation's teaching force will have access to programs for continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century."

In exploring how to achieve this goal, educators are turning their attention and resources increasingly to the priority of professional development. Teacher mentoring programs are now perceived as an effective staff development approach for beginning teachers. By establishing teacher mentoring programs, the district serves two important purposes: novice teachers are given a strong start at the beginning of their careers, and experienced classroom teachers serving as mentors receive recognition and incentives (Little and Nelson, 1990). Researchers believe that mentoring can be a valuable process in educational reform for beginning teachers as well as veteran teachers (Ganser, 1996). Supporting beginning teachers at the outset contributes to retention of new teachers in the school system. Formalizing the mentor role for experienced teachers creates another niche in the career ladder for teachers and contributes to the professionalism of education.

The significance of mentoring for beginning teachers is gaining wider recognition throughout the Pacific region. Planning the development of a mentoring program was initiated in Kosrae, Federated States of Micronesia. In 1993, the Office of Personnel Services in the Hawai'i State Department of Education disseminated "Guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs." The intent of these guidelines, developed in collaboration with the Hawai'i State Teachers Association, was "to develop additional mentor teacher projects at schools and to support existing men-

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tor projects" (November 1, 1993). As attention continues to be focused on teachers as a key factor in educational reform, and on their need for ongoing improvement and support, mentoring becomes a viable option in educational policy. Without this focus on professional improvement for teachers, some researchers believe that educational reform efforts will eventually fail (Dilworth and Imig, 1995).

Mentoring Process

The mentoring process is not always clearly understood in education. Researchers are becoming increasingly cognizant of its complexity. Head, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1992) write that the "heart and soul" of mentoring grows out of belief "in the value and worth of people and an attitude toward education that focuses upon passing the torch to the next generation of teachers." The mentoring process extends far beyond supporting the induction of new teachers into the school system through professional guidance and encouragement. Shadio (1996) believes that the heart of mentorship comes from "a commitment to education, a hope for its future, and a respect for those who enter into its community."

According to Head, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1992), major aspects that contribute to the complexity of mentoring include the multiple needs of beginning teachers as well as their mentors, their developmental issues or concerns, their repertoire of teaching skills, the school culture that may impact positively or negatively on the mentoring process, and numerous other variables. Research indicates that mentoring is a more demanding process than classroom teaching, and that even experienced teachers cannot always objectively assess the quality of teaching performance of beginning teachers (Bey and Holmes, 1992).

Definition of Mentoring

Numerous interpretations of the mentoring process are contained in the literature on mentoring. It is commonly agreed that the process includes the various developmental phases of the mentoring relationship, the dynamics of the mentoring relationship itself, and the application of cognitive developmental theory to the mentoring process (Bey and Holmes,1992).

In education, mentoring is a complex and multi-dimensional process of guiding, teaching, influencing and supporting a beginning or new teacher. It is generally accepted that a mentor teacher leads, guides and advises another teacher more junior in experience in a work situation characterized by mutual trust and belief.

Typically, mentoring programs pair novice teachers with more experienced teachers who can ably explain school policies, regulations and procedures; share methods, materials and other resources; help solve problems in teaching and learning; provide personal and professional support; and guide the growth of the new teacher through reflection, collaboration, and shared inquiry (Feiman-Nemser and Parker, 1992).

Mentoring/Modeling/Coaching

The terms mentoring, modeling, and coaching are frequently used interchangeably by educators. While there are overlaps in meaning among these terms, there are significant differences in concept. Modeling is the process of serving as a model. A model is a tangible embodiment of an idea or ideal (a product). One of the functions of a mentor is to be a positive role model.

In the context of teaching, coaching, frequently referred to as peer coaching, is the assistance that one teacher provides to another in the development of teaching skills, strategies, or techniques generally within a formal three-part structure: peer-conference, lesson observation, and post-conference. In doing classroom observation in mentoring, the coaching structure is commonly used to structure the classroom observation by the mentor. Coaching by the mentor may also become an essential activity if this type of support is needed by the beginning teacher.

Mentoring is the process of serving as a mentor, someone who facilitates and assists another's development. The process includes modeling because the mentor must be able to model the messages and suggestions being taught to the beginning teacher (Gay, 1995). Also, as indicated, the mentor must be able to serve as a model of the teacher's role in education. The mentoring process includes coaching as an instructional technique used in endeavors such as sports or apprenticeship at the work place. In addition, it includes "cognitive coaching," a term gaining wider familiarity in education. To be effective, the mentor must be able to demonstrate a range of cognitive coaching competencies, such as posing carefully constructed questions to stimulate reflection, paraphrasing, probing, using wait-time, and collecting and using data to improve teaching and learning. Mentoring, like coaching, is a collaborative process (Gay, 1995). However, as a function—a special duty required of a person—mentoring has considerably more dimensions than coaching or modeling. Therefore, it is more complex and demanding (Head, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall, 1992).

Qualities of Mentor Teachers

An experienced teacher who facilitates the development and education of a new teacher, the mentor is regarded as a career professional. According to Hawai'i's guidelines for Mentor Teacher Programs, the mentor must possess ideals and expertise of the teaching profession, which are shared with the new teacher (Office of Personnel Services, 1993).

The functions of the mentor teacher vary depending on the needs of the new employee, the goals of the mentoring program, and the local and broader educational context or situation. It should be kept in mind that the mentor teacher is a helper, not a supervisor or evaluator, and "a very special person, a model of professionalism" (Office of Personnel Services, 1993).

Hawai'i's experience with mentoring has identified the following essential qualities of mentor teachers:

1. A range of interpersonal skills to fit a variety of professional encounters and situations.

2. Good working knowledge of a repertoire of teaching methods, alternative modalities of learning, and styles of teaching and learning that affect student achievement.

3. Ability to use coaching processes that foster increased self-direction and self-responsibility of the beginning teacher.

4. Effective communication skills that facilitate the growth of the new employee and accommodate the employee's emotional, social and cognitive needs.

5. Understanding the stages of teacher development within the context of how adults learn.

Mentoring for Human Development

Staff development is crucial in creating successful mentoring relationships, and plays a pivotal role in mentoring programs (Janas, 1996). Although mentoring has served as a developer of human potential since Odysseus entrusted the education and care of his son to his friend Mentor more than 3,000 years ago, much of what is called mentoring is not real mentoring (Little, 1990). Mentoring extends beyond induction and guidance. In order to unleash the power of mentoring as a means of professional development, educators must understand the complexity of mentoring and implement the process with due attention to this complexity. Head, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1992) believe that mentoring "can make a difference for teachers, but it needs to be real mentoring complete with its complexity in process and function."

Starting Mentoring Programs

Many teachers are leaving the teaching profession. Better support structures must be devised to induct new teachers and retain them in the teaching ranks (Huling-Austin, 1989). A mentoring program can play a vital role in inducting newcomers and motivating them to remain in teaching.

Janas (1996) advances four major tasks that schools and districts must deal with in starting a mentoring program: (1) selecting and training individuals to serve as mentors; (2) matching mentors with protégés; (3) setting goals and expectations; and (4) establishing the mentoring program.

Selecting and Training Mentors

Key to the success of any mentoring program is the competence of the mentor who must possess the expertise, commitment, and time to provide assistance to novice teachers. Teachers within a school at the immediate environment of potential protégés represent an obvious starting place in identifying mentor teachers. There is no fixed rule about which traits or circumstances are most critical in a given mentoring situation (Gray and Gray, 1985). Freedman (1993) reports that the most frequently mentioned characteristic of effective mentors is a willingness to nurture another person. Therefore, individuals recruited as mentors should be people-oriented, open-minded, flexible, empathetic, and collaborative.

Mentors should be enrolled in an ongoing mentoring training program. Training in communication and active listening techniques, relationship skills, effective teaching, models of supervision and coaching, conflict resolution, and problem solving are often included in training opportunities for mentors (Head, Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall, 1992).

Matching Mentors and Protégés

One of the first considerations when establishing mentor pairs is proximity. Proximity greatly facilitates the mentor-protégé relationship that is the heart of the supportive process (Freedman, 1993).

Asking for volunteer mentors is an effective way of recruiting mentors. Studies suggest, however, that a successful mentor-protégé relationship requires "desire by both parties" (Gehrke, 1988). In addition to personal and professional traits, there are other pertinent ways of establishing good matches between mentor and protégé. These include a gender match; a common ethnic, racial, cultural, or class background; similarity of work assignments; and others (Freedman 1993).

Setting Goals and Expectations

The importance of setting goals and expectations for the mentoring program cannot be overemphasized (Janas, 1996). Clear goals and expectations must be articulated that are specific to both the types of mentorship to be developed and what is intended to be accomplished (Freedman and Jaffe, 1993).

Specific functions to be served by the mentor should be clearly stated and plans must be developed to successfully carry out these functions. Each mentor-protégé pair must have specific and appropriate goals. It is important for staff developers to work with mentors and protégés early in the process to help them set goals, because this is a crucial initial step. Staff developers should model the process by deciding on their own goals and having their protégés—the mentors—share expectations (Janas, 1996). Without careful planning, support and goal setting, formal mentoring programs are "destined to fail" (Haensley, 1990).

Establishing Mentoring Programs

There is no fixed way of establishing a mentoring program. One researcher recommends that after goals are set, it becomes timely to establish the mentoring program so that it will support the mentor-protégé pairs "throughout the development of their relationship." An initial step is to build a support structure that includes the making

of physical arrangements and the handling of logistics. Another step is to create mechanisms for monitoring and communicating to ensure continual assessment of the relationship. A third step is to evaluate the staff developer's skills and abilities, and the mentoring program (Janas, 1996).

The emotional and social aspects of the mentoring process must be respected in establishing a mentoring program. Sensitivity is a necessary dimension of sharing professional expertise, personal knowledge and creativity. Therefore, staff developers working with mentors and mentors working with protégés must work toward competence in such areas as counseling, mediation, negotiation, intervention and clinical supervision (Janas, 1996).

Conclusions

Mentoring remains a viable policy option in education. However, for purposeful mentoring to occur, a prerequisite is the acceptance of its complexity in carrying out the mentoring function. This implies careful planning. Teachers are valuable resources in education, and high quality performance in teaching is an essential ingredient of educational improvement or reform. To assist beginning teachers, it is necessary to support their performance in the classroom from the very beginning of their teaching careers. Support in the form of well-designed mentoring programs can be pivotal in inducting new teachers into the profession and keeping them in education.
The stakes are high. Quality teaching is essential if the mission of education is to be fulfilled. Mentoring can play a critical role in continually improving the professional knowledge and skills that teachers need to instruct and prepare students for the next century. However, to be effective, mentoring programs must be developed that take into account the complexity, process and function of the programs.

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